

Flora and Fauna of Aotearoa 25th June, 2025

Feral cats on the Predator Free 2050 list? Why it's dangerous and unethical.

New Zealanders have just days to stop feral cats from being officially labelled a “predator for eradication” in the Predator Free 2050 strategy. Public submissions close 5pm Monday, 30th June 2025.

The proposal to list feral cats as a target for eradication by 2050 is a serious threat to animal welfare and public values, and it is being advanced without a genuine national conversation or broad public engagement.

Feral cats certainly pose a risk to sensitive New Zealand ecosystems, but inclusion on the PF2050 list promotes a fanatical, eradication-at-all-costs mentality that is neither humane nor scientifically sound.

Here's why Flora and Fauna of Aotearoa opposes the move to add cats to the list, and why we need you to speak up.

[Read more about the strategy review.](#)
[Link to DOC's online submission form.](#)

Feral cats come from us - not the wild

Feral cats are not a distinct species. They originate from lost, abandoned, or unneutered pet cats. With 40% of New Zealand households sharing their homes with at least one cat¹, there is a continual flow of domestic cats into the stray and feral population.

This is a human-made issue. Trying to “eradicate” feral cats while ignoring the source is like bailing out a boat without fixing the leak. The answer lies in responsible pet ownership: desexing, microchipping, and preventing abandonment. A national strategy is needed at the source of the problem.

Eradication is not only impossible - it is inhumane

PF2050 is an eradication framework that seeks to eradicate certain predator species by 2050. Including feral cats in this list would invite cruelty under the guise of conservation. We already see horrific experimentation, abuse and hate towards cats and other ‘pest animals’ in New Zealand, and this step will make things worse.

The infamous “possum punch” that was videoed and shared on social media² and the kitten from Beach Haven who had its “tail ripped off” and a threatening note sent to its owner stating “Ur cats are dead,”³ show the kind of abuse these animals can be subject to.

Another example is the highly questionable use of 1080-poisoned rat carcasses to indirectly kill cats on Rakiura, Stewart Island, by The Department of Conservation.⁴ These secondary poisoning methods cause prolonged sickness and painful deaths in violation of the Animal Welfare Act 1999 (sec. 12 (c)).⁵ This is not humane pest control - it is state-sanctioned animal cruelty.

What is secondary poisoning?

Secondary poisoning happens when an animal eats another animal that has already ingested poison - for example, a cat consuming a poisoned rat. In DOC's current operations, this is not accidental - it is intentional.

The method causes prolonged suffering, as poisons like 1080 can take hours or days to kill. It is indiscriminate, inhumane, and deeply unethical, especially when aimed at sentient animals like cats.

A threat to your pets - and social licence

Adding feral cats to the list will make them fair game for anyone with a trap. The Predator Free vision includes “everyone from professionals to school children”. That means cats - feral or not - are at risk from amateurs targeting stray or pet cats and using poorly set, infrequently checked traps.

The reality is, many people do not draw a clear distinction between feral, stray and pet cats and are not responsible or compassionate enough to carry out work that should be done by professionals.

We are already seeing it happen. Reported in Paerata Rise, south of Auckland in 2024, 20 cats went missing in a single year. Residents suspect feral cat trapping is the cause. One stray, adopted by a dementia patient, was found hanging from a trap. Local SPCA data showed at least 12 pet cats were caught and released by the same programme. Others were never seen again.⁶

Pet cats have been commonly targeted by neighbourhood self-proclaimed “cat haters” and comments sections online are frequently littered with comments like “the only good cat is a dead cat” and other hate directed at cats.

This is not “predator control” - it is the destruction of people’s family members and emotional support animals.

No safeguards, no accountability

Unlike stoats or rats, cats are emotionally significant animals to many New Zealanders. Yet, no mechanisms have been proposed to prevent pet or stray cats from becoming collateral damage if feral cats are listed. Calls for trappers to check for microchips or photograph their catch have been ridiculed by Predator Free advocates.

In one response, a community trapper dismissed suggestions to use microchip scanners as “ridiculous” - stating it is impossible to scan a panicked animal in a trap.⁷ Yet SPCA policy clearly advocates for humane treatment, desexing, and scanning stray animals to reunite them with owners.

There are no enforcement tools or accountability measures to prevent backyard trapping from turning lethal.

Feral cats do affect wildlife - but they also control pests

We do not deny that feral cats pose a threat in ecologically sensitive areas. In some places, targeted control is necessary - and it is already happening.

But the story is more complex. Feral cats also prey on rabbits, rats, mice, and even stoats. If feral cats were to be removed from areas where they are actually managing other pest species adequately, we risk triggering a ‘meso-predator release’ - which means allowing smaller pests like rats, mice, and stoats to surge. This can result in native wildlife losing predator-awareness over time.⁸ Research shows that when predators are removed, prey species often fail to recognise threats.⁹ This reduces the resilience and natural instincts of our native species, making them even more vulnerable.

Taking a holistic, sustainable approach means caring for the environment in a way that honours balance, relationship, and long-term responsibility - it requires taking the whole picture into account. Rather than chasing eradication as an ideological goal, a holistic approach guides us to seek thoughtful, humane, and ecologically grounded solutions that respect all life, including animals caught in the margins of human impact.

Management works. It just needs support.

Feral cats are highly adaptive and widespread, and with a huge population of domestic and stray cats, eradication is simply not achievable across mainland New Zealand.

What is achievable, though, is significantly improved management - and this is exactly what welfare groups and many others working in animal management have been asking for.

What we need is not a new predator listing, but proper investment in feral cat management. Humane strategies already exist. They include:

- Desexing and microchipping to reduce stray populations at the source.
- Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) programmes for strays, which have proven effective in areas.¹⁰
- Professionally-led control in ecologically sensitive zones.
- National education campaigns around responsible pet ownership.
- Targeted funding for programmes, councils and community groups already doing the work.

Cats are woven into our homes, hearts, and culture

Cats have lived alongside humans for thousands of years. In Aotearoa today, more than 1.26 million cats live in people's homes. They provide companionship, emotional support, and pest control. Companion Animals NZ notes that 68% of people acquire cats for love and affection.¹¹

The backlash to Gareth Morgan's infamous 2013 call to eliminate domestic cats¹² proved just how deeply this country cares about its cats. The SPCA and other animal welfare advocates have made their position clear: while feral cat populations may need to be controlled, eradication through inhumane or indiscriminate methods is unacceptable.¹³

Eradication is not ethical. It is not practical. And it is not the New Zealand way.

A limited and poorly signposted consultation

DOC is now asking the public whether feral cats should be included on the Predator Free 2050 target species list - but the question is buried at the very end of the submission form (Questions 15 and 16). There is no headline reference in the strategy summary. Most people will not realise that this review could pave the way for formal inclusion. Instead of open public dialogue, the framing suggests DOC is seeking to test the waters quietly, guided by a narrow conservationist lens rather than national consensus.

This makes it all the more important that people speak up - because if enough submissions remain silent, DOC could interpret that as public support.

Suggested responses

Question 15: What are the benefits of not including feral cats on the national target species list at this time?

Not including feral cats helps avoid the normalisation of inhumane and indiscriminate methods such as 1080 poisoning and amateur trapping. It prevents harm to pet cats and strays, who are frequently misidentified and already at risk of abuse. Exclusion from the list allows space for investment in humane and effective management strategies - including desexing, microchipping, Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR), and professional control in ecologically sensitive areas. A non-eradication approach also better aligns with community values and animal welfare obligations.

Question 16: What are the risks of not including feral cats on the target species list at this time?

There are localised biodiversity risks where feral cats pose a threat to endangered species - particularly in ecologically sensitive areas. However, these risks can and are already being managed through targeted control programmes. The key risk of not including feral cats is the potential for underfunding these efforts. To address this, DOC should develop a separate national feral cat management strategy with animal welfare groups, appropriate funding, oversight, and public education. This can be done without resorting to eradication frameworks that raise ethical, ecological, and social concerns.

Past attempts to include cats have failed due to public outcry. This time, the review appears to be guided by a narrow group of conservationists with strong anti-cat sentiment, rather than reflecting true national consensus.

Flora and Fauna of Aotearoa believes consultation should include cat owners, community groups, SPCA representatives, and everyday New Zealanders - not just those engaged in the Predator Free 2050 agenda.

What Flora and Fauna are calling for

We support:

- National investment in humane feral cat management.
- Pet desexing subsidies, especially in problem areas, microchipping, and public education.
- Funding for professional trapping contractors, not amateurs, to control in high-risk areas.
- Transparent reporting and accountability for all trapping efforts.
- A standalone national strategy on feral cats, outside the eradication-based PF2050 model.

We oppose:

- Including feral cats on the PF2050 list.

- The normalisation of cruel, slow-kill poisons like 1080.
- The use of public conservation funding to kill animals that may be pets.
- Backyard trapping with no safeguards or oversight.

Speak now - before more cats die

The time to act is now. DOC's Predator Free 2050 strategy review closes at 5pm on Monday, 30 June 2025.

We ask you to make a submission - even a short one - opposing the inclusion of feral cats.

Tell DOC you support **management, not eradication**. Tell them you support **compassion, not cruelty**.

Most of all, tell them that New Zealand deserves better than this.

[Read more about the strategy review.](#)

[Link to the online submission form.](#) Questions 15 and 16 (at the very end) relate to feral cats.

Or you can email DoC with your objections/submissions here: pf2050discussion@doc.govt.nz

Deadline: 5pm, Monday 30 June 2025

References:

¹ 'Companion animals in New Zealand: NZ pet data report 2024', <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5d1bf13a3f8e880001289eeb/t/67c5362c18b9881a1fec4b5d/1740977787548/CANZ+2024+Pet+Data+Report-compressed.pdf>

² 'Animal cruelty or pest control? Video shows possum being punched in the face', <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/animal-cruelty-or-pest-control-video-shows-possum-being-punched-in-the-face/CP3ZF4GOUHRNDW3MNV3LAKIE6Y/>

³ 'Beach Haven community rally around mother after kitten's tail 'ripped off' and threatening note left', <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/beach-haven-community-rally-around-mother-after-kittens-tail-ripped-off-and-threatening-note/WPCDRGO755H6XKQJGMXYEYOPNU/>

⁴ 'Planned Rakiura 1080 drop criticised', <https://www.odt.co.nz/southland/planned-rakiura-1080-drop-criticised>

⁵ Animal Welfare Act 1999, <https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/1999/0142/latest/DLM50401.html>

⁶ 'The trapper, the developer and the case of Paerata's missing pets', <https://www.pressreader.com/new-zealand/sunday-star-times/20241215/281681145471713>

⁷ 'The trapper, the developer and the case of Paerata's missing pets', <https://www.pressreader.com/new-zealand/sunday-star-times/20241215/281681145471713>

⁸ 'The rise of the mesopredator', <https://nywolf.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/The-Rise-of-the-Mesopredator.pdf>

⁹ 'Predicting predator recognition in a changing world', https://blumsteinlab.eeb.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/104/2017/05/CartheyBlumstein_2017_TREE.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com

¹⁰ 'Assessment of a targeted Trap-Neuter-Return pilot study in Auckland, New Zealand', https://www.researchgate.net/publication/325122592_Assessment_of_a_Targeted_Trap-Neuter-Return_Pilot_Study_in_Auckland_New_Zealand

¹¹ 'Companion animals in New Zealand: NZ pet data report 2024', <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5d1bf13a3f8e880001289eeb/t/67c5362c18b9881a1fec4b5d/1740977787548/CANZ+2024+Pet+Data+Report-compressed.pdf>

¹² 'The cat menace', <https://www.forestandbird.org.nz/resources/cat-menace>

¹³ 'Position statements: feral cats', <https://www.sPCA.nz/advocacy/position-statements/article/feral-cats>